

1. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj is an innovation of the UPA Government because no previous government has had a separate Ministry or even Department of Panchayati Raj. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj came into existence on 27th May, 2004, and within a month, Hon'ble Prime Minister called his very first Conference of Chief Ministers on 24th June 2004, on the subject "Rural Prosperity and Poverty Eradication through Panchayati Raj". While inaugurating the Conference, he spoke of Panchayati Raj being a medium to transform rural India into 700 million opportunities, of Gram Swaraj being the key instrument for integrating economic reforms with institutional reforms in the country side, the challenges of institutionalizing the system of local self-governance while also making it the world's most representative and participatory democracy. The first mandate of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj is to ensure conformity to the Constitutional provisions of Part IX of the Constitution read with Article 243 ZD of Part IXA relating to the District Planning Committees together with the Eleventh Schedule which sets out a list of 29 matters, to be considered by State Legislatures for devolution to the Panchayats.

2. The first task before the Ministry was to evolve a national consensus in respect of the Roadmap for Panchayati Raj through mutual consultation between the Centre and the States. Ministry of Panchayati Raj convened Seven Round Tables of State Panchayati Raj Ministers with the Union Minister of Panchayati Raj between July and December 2004. The deliberations centered on the 18 identified dimensions of Panchayati Raj ranging from the effective Devolution of the Functions, finances and Functionaries to District Planning, Training and Capacity Building and IT enabled e-governance.

Involving PRIs in implementing Bio-fuel Programme

2486. SHRI SUDARSHAN AKARAPU: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have recently proposed to involve/integrate Panchayati Raj Institutions in the implementation of bio-fuel (bio-diesel) programmes; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Under its Rural Business Hub initiative, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has been working to promote the cultivation of Jatropha for bio-diesel by involving Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

The Union Government is acting as a facilitator between the State Governments, Panchayati Raj Institutions and the Corporate Sector with the help of the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII). Interested PRIs are being introduced to business houses which express their desire to encourage the local community to take up Jatropha cultivation in their respective jurisdiction. Three MoUs in this connection have been signed between D-1 Oils (India) on the one hand, and PRIs in the districts of Mewat, Faridabad and Yamuna Nagar in Haryana, on the other, backed up by a letter of intent from the Indian Oil Corporation to D-1 Oil offering to purchase bio-diesel so produced within the framework of Government's Bio-diesel Purchase Policy formulated by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

The Union Government, in association with State Governments, PRIs and the Petroleum Conservator and Research Association (PCRA), has conducted several awareness programmes on the plantation of Jatropha, collection of seeds and extraction of oil for the production of bio-diesel. A joint Committee of the Ministries of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Panchayati Raj and the Planning Commission has been formed with different stakeholders and specialized technical agencies to encourage PRIs to involve themselves through RHB, in promoting the cultivation of Jatropha for bio-diesel.

Raising of Retirement Age

2487. DR. M.A.M. RAMASWAMY: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to raise the retirement age of Central Government employees from 60 years to 62 years;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PERSONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES AND PENSIONS (SHRI SURESH PACHOURI):

(a) No such proposal at present, is under consideration of the Ministry of Personnel.